



A 4-Part Catholic Study Guide
by Terry A. Modica

REDEMPTORIS MISSIO
"Mission of the Redeemer"

**On The Permanent Validity
of the Church's Missionary Mandate**
An Encyclical Letter of Pope John Paul II



From Easter to Pentecost and Beyond – Every Day!

How does Christ minister in the world today?

What does the Holy Spirit do for Catholic evangelization?

Do you know your value to the Kingdom of God?

How to Use This Study Guide

In this four-week course, you will study:

- Jesus Christ, the only Savior, and his mission today
- The Holy Spirit, the principal agent of this mission
- The paths of mission and the road to successful evangelization
- Missionary spirituality in your own everyday life

There are four lessons to read at home. They contain quotes from the Church document, *Redemptoris Missio*, along with commentary that explains what you're reading. At the end of each lesson are theological reflection questions. Write your answers, then take them to your faith sharing community or bible study group for discussion.

Although this study guide provides most of the document, you might want to have a copy of *Redemptoris Missio* in it's convenient, pocket-size book format. You can find this book:

- at your local Catholic book store
- or order it from Pauline Books & Media
www.pauline.org/store/

Use a highlighter or pen to mark the key phrases in the book that match the key phrases provided in this study guide. This will help you zero in on the topic being discussed.

When scriptures are referenced, add to your understanding of the lesson by looking them up in your Bible.

The best way to find out what the document is saying *to your own life* is to first read the portion assigned for the week and highlight the messages that are important to you. Then come back to this study guide and read the excerpts and commentary.

The excerpts quoted are printed in the boxes, with key phrases highlighted in bold text. The explanatory commentary about each quote follows it.

About the Author/Instructor of this Study Guide:

Terry Modica converted to Catholicism in 1977, at which time she began to study official Church teachings in order to understand and dig deep into her new faith. Always involved in her parishes, she gained a reputation for inspirational teaching and spiritual leadership in Adult Religious Education, prayer groups, Parish Council, and as diocesan staff writer. She has a degree in Theology, and has been certified by the Diocese of Trenton, NJ, for Pastoral Administration, and is a certified graduate of the Lay Pastoral Ministry Institute of the Diocese of St. Petersburg, Florida.

She is the Director of Good New Ministries (www.gnm.org), the author of the daily Good News Reflections (www.gnm.org/DailyReflections) and has been teaching courses and seminars on the Catholic Catechism and Church documents since 1994.

Part 1

Jesus Christ, the only Savior, and his mission today

Introduction

1. **The mission of Christ the Redeemer, which is entrusted to the Church, is still very far from completion.** As the second millennium after Christ's coming draws to an end, an overall view of the human race shows that **this mission is still only beginning** and that **we must commit ourselves wholeheartedly to its service.** It is the Spirit who impels us to proclaim the great works of God: "For if I preach the Gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!" (1 Cor 9: 16)

The first paragraph provides the reasons that this document was written and its main themes:

1. Christ's mission of redemption was not completed on the cross and in his resurrection. In fact, it's far from finished.
2. In further fact, it's still only in the beginning stages!
3. When Christ's body ascended into heaven, his disciples (the Church) began his new body, his presence on earth. Jesus continues his mission through us.
4. The Holy Spirit impels us, calls us forth, energizes and empowers us for this mission. The Holy Spirit provided the inspiration and power to Jesus during his three-year mission-starter years, and ever since the disciples received the fullness of his Spirit in power on Pentecost, all of us in the Church are given that same Spirit of inspiration and power.

If we let the Holy Spirit of God take charge of our lives and we pay attention to the Spirit's urgings, we will feel what St. Paul did: "Woe am I if I do not do it!" It's not a "woe" like a punishment for failing to do what God calls us to do; it's a "woe" like "Ohhh, I feel miserable when I hold back the power of the Spirit! I've got to release this power from within me and do the work of the Lord, or else I feel frustrated and unfulfilled!"

In the name of the whole Church, I sense an urgent duty to repeat this cry of St. Paul. From the beginning of my Pontificate I have chosen to

travel to the ends of the earth in order to show this missionary concern. My direct contact with peoples who do not know Christ has convinced me even more of the *urgency of missionary activity*, a subject to which I am devoting the present encyclical.

The Second Vatican Council sought to renew the Church's life and activity in the light of the needs of the contemporary world.

Putting this mission into historical perspective, we're reminded that before Vatican Council II, we'd lost a sense of our primary mission as the Body of Christ. Our participation in the mission needed to be renewed. All the documents that were produced during the council, and those that were written afterward to help implement the decisions of Vatican Council II, are directed toward to this imperative: Sometimes they seek to evangelize the world (the teachings on moral truth, for example), sometimes they teach us how to evangelize the world (the documents about vocations and lay apostolates, for example), and sometimes they call us to get out of our little self-enclosed worlds of private faith to reach beyond ourselves and help change the world (social justice teachings, for example).

The Council emphasized **the Church's "missionary nature,"** ...

I'd like to take a moment to define "missionary." Since most if not all of those who use this study guide are not being called to the mission fields of non-Christian countries, we'll be focusing on the mission fields of our everyday lives, which we encounter in ordinary circumstances where we already live, work, and play.

The missionary activity of the Church is not limited to "missionaries" who travel to foreign lands. Neither is it limited to the clergy who give "parish missions" to stir up the faith of congregations. You and I and every person in the Church are all missionaries, and most of us are called to do it right here, where God has already placed us: in our homes, our workplaces, our play-places, our circles of friendships, and so on.

... basing it in a dynamic way on **the Trinitarian mission** itself.

The "Trinitarian mission" is this: The Father sent the Son and gave him the Holy Spirit. Remember what happened at Jesus' baptism? The Holy Spirit descended like a dove upon Jesus, and the Father's voice said from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." In the Jordan River, Jesus was reborn from ordinary life into ministry (see Luke 3:15-22).

The same thing happened to us when we were baptized. There is only one baptism. When we were baptized, we were united to the baptism of Jesus and to the Father who says, "This is my beloved child, with whom I am well pleased." (Yes, the Father said this about you!) The Father gave to us the same measure of the Holy Spirit as he gave to Jesus. Sound incredible? Impossible? Jesus made it possible when he died to redeem us from sin and its effect of separating us from God. Then he breathed on the disciples and said, "I am giving you the Holy Spirit" (see John 20:19-22).

The missionary thrust therefore belongs to the very nature of the Christian life, and **is also the inspiration behind ecumenism**: "that they may all be one...so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21).

Anything that divides the Body of Christ is a hindrance to evangelization: It works against the mission of the Redeemer, because it's a terrible and damaging witness to the world of what God is like. As the Body of a divided Christ, we present a false image: a prejudiced and hateful Christ, a disagreeable and argumentative Christ. This is why Vatican Council II has led the Catholic Church into a whole new attitude about Protestants. Whereas we used to emphasize our differences and even called Protestants "anathema" (accursed and evil), we now see the importance of ecumenism, which means loving the Lord together, which means loving one another despite our differences.

2. The Council has already borne much fruit in the realm of missionary activity. There has been an increase of local churches with their own bishops, clergy and workers in the apostolate. The presence of Christian communities is more evident in the life of nations, and communion between the churches has led to a lively exchange of spiritual benefits and gifts. The commitment of the laity to the work of evangelization is changing ecclesial life, while particular churches are more willing to meet with the members of other Christian churches and other

religions, and to enter into dialogue and cooperation with them. Above all, there is a new awareness that *missionary activity is a matter for all Christians*, for all dioceses and parishes, Church institutions and associations.

Nevertheless, in this "new springtime" of Christianity there is an undeniable negative tendency, and the present document is meant to help overcome it. **Missionary activity specifically directed "to the nations" (*ad gentes*)** appears to be waning, and this tendency is certainly not in line with the directives of the Council and of subsequent statements of the Magisterium. Difficulties both internal and external have weakened the Church's missionary thrust toward non-Christians, a fact which must arouse concern among all who believe in Christ. For in the Church's history, missionary drive has always been a sign of vitality, just as its lessening is a sign of a crisis of faith.

Remember the Latin term *ad gentes*, because we will see it throughout this document. It refers to the outward motion of faith, taking the Gospel out from our private little faith worlds "to the nations", i.e., to the world where Jesus is not known (including those who think they know about Jesus but understand him incorrectly and therefore have no desire to trust in him).

Twenty-five years after the conclusion of the Council and the publication of the Decree on Missionary Activity *Ad Gentes*, fifteen years after the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* issued by Pope Paul VI, and in continuity with the magisterial teaching of my predecessors, I wish to invite the Church to *renew her missionary commitment*. **The present document has as its goal an interior renewal of faith and Christian life.**

We cannot take the faith outward until the faith within us is genuine and well formed.

For missionary activity renews the Church, revitalizes faith and Christian identity, and offers fresh enthusiasm and new incentive.

Successfully sharing the faith with others activates their participation in the Body of Christ and brings increased health and energy to the Body and its activities. Think about the state of the Church's health today. Does the Body need healing, repentance, reform or renewal in anything? Recent scandals within the priesthood is one example that proves the answer is yes. A divorce rate that's no lower than divorces among

And so on ... skipping pages here, to let you preview the Theological Reflection Questions, too...

The full e-book is 53 pages.

Group participants should have folders or binders to hold the materials. Margins have room for hole-punching.

evil things
raising up
risen Lord and
mankind, we haven't changed the world enough.

We know, however, that Jesus came to bring integral salvation, one which embraces the whole person and all mankind, and **opens up the wondrous prospect of divine filiation** [i.e., the privilege of becoming children of God by adoption for the sake of eternal life]. *Why mission?* Because to us, as to St. Paul, "this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph 3:8). Newness of life in him is the "Good News" for men and women of every age: all are called to it and destined for it. Indeed, all people are searching for it, albeit at times in a confused way, and have a right to know the value of this gift and to approach it freely. **The Church, and every individual Christian within her, may not keep hidden or monopolize this newness and richness which has been received from God's bounty** in order to be communicated to all mankind.

Is your faith a secret? Do you keep it hidden from anyone? You don't have to preach at people, and usually that's the worst way to share the Good News, but do take it out of hiding! Opportunities are lost when we hide our faith. All that's required is that others know you're a Catholic Christian; when the Holy Spirit works in their hearts, they will become ready to find out more about your faith. But if they don't know you have faith, then what?

to re-
gnt, word and
be saved, they

will be judged more severely" (*Lumen Gen-
tium*).

All I can say to that is, WOW. Egads! Are we doing enough?

Theological reflection questions:

1. In all that you read from this Church document and the instructor's commentary, what did you find most helpful?
2. What did you find most challenging? Why?
3. What does it mean to you personally to believe that the Church is a "sacrament of salvation"?